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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: G-20, NORTH KOREA

11. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused April 8 news coverage on the ongoing investigations into former President Chen Shui-bian and his family's legal cases; on Taiwan's economic situation; on developments in cross-Straits relations; and on the Pentagon's new defense budget proposal unveiled Monday. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a column in the pro-unification "United Daily News" discussed the recently concluded G-20 summit in London and said that China is now the anchor for the world's economic stability, a role that no other country can ignore. A column in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" said the talk of "G-2, involving only the United States and China, is not only premature but also unwise," and it will not sit well with the world. With regard to North Korea, a column in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" called Pyongyang the winner in a four-hand card game with Washington, Tokyo and Seoul. A separate "China Times" column, however, said that what will really give U.S. President Barack Obama a headache over the next four or eight years is Iran's development of nuclear weapons and the turmoil in Pakistan and Afghanistan. End summary.

12. G-20

A) "China Is Sitting, with the United States Standing aside"

The "United Notes" column in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] wrote (4/8):

"... The financial tsunami [swept the world], with the United States being the epicenter and the chief culprit. Now the whole world is fixing its eyes on China, hoping that it will be a savior but also fearing that it will be the star of calamity. The economic growth of China in 2009 will be essential as to whether the world will be able to heave a sigh of relief. China is the United States' greatest creditor nation; [Chinese Premier] Wen Jiabao had twice expressed concern over U.S. government bonds before the [G-20] summit, and [U.S. President Barack] Obama was forced to step forward and respond [to China's concerns]. China took the lead in questioning the [role of] the U.S. dollar, sending Washington running around with its hair on fire up to now. [Ed. Note: The Taiwanese dialect expression says literally "holding onto one's head as it burns."] [Chinese President] Hu Jintao would not allow Hong Kong and Macau to be listed on the gray list of tax havens, and Obama had to ask the French president to yield, so that China could win both face and substance. China is now the third-largest economy in the world; all the more, it is the anchor for economic stability of the world now, yet it never forgets to stamp its feet once in a while. ...

"China was sitting [in the center of a group photo taken during the G-20 summit], while all the capitalist leaders stood to the side. For this moment, only economics is hard facts and top priority. Should there be a card called 'ideology' on the political negotiation table, it is not even qualified to stand on the sidelines now."

B) "G-2 May Not Sit Well with the World"

Columnist Frank Ching wrote in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] (4/8):

"... China no doubt finds the Obama approach refreshing. While Chinese officials personally liked Bush, Obama is different in that he has adopted a tone of humility in his foreign policy, insisting that the United States should listen rather than dictate. He is also more willing to treat China as an equal. The hope on both sides is that they will build a long-lasting strategic relationship that will enable them to cooperate in dealing with global problems, from the financial crisis to climate change. ...

"But problems will inevitably crop up. One example is the continued operation of American surveillance vessels in the South China Sea, which meet with Beijing's implacable opposition and, at some point, may well result in another confrontation. Arms sales to Taiwan will also continue to be a point of friction. Talk of a G-2, involving only the United States and China, is not only premature but also unwise. Such an arrangement will not go down well with the rest of the world, especially with America's allies in Asia and elsewhere. There is no need to put in place a Sino-American condominium. But it is vitally important two countries talk to each other, to understand each other and, if possible, to have a common approach on major international issues."

13. North Korea

A) "A [Four-Hand] Card Game in Which One Wins the Pot"

The "International Lookout" column in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 150,000] wrote (4/8):

"A spokesman for the U.S. government said, 'with regard to the missile test-firing, North Korea is by no means a winner. It will only become more isolated.' If Pyongyang is not a winner, then who is? ... This is a [four-hand] card game in which one [player] wins the pot, and the only winner is naturally North Korea, which has bolstered its prestige and power, tested its technology and elevated its bargaining chips for talks. The joint forces of the United States, Japan and South Korea could do nothing about it. What else can Pyongyang be, if not the winner?

"Washington said Pyongyang will become more isolated. Surely Pyongyang does not like to be isolated, but in order to survive and grow in strength, it still has to stand up straight, even if it is isolated. As a matter of fact, Pyongyang has more fear of Washington, Tokyo and Seoul than the three have of him. The only way for Pyongyang to penetrate the isolation and generate confidence is to develop nuclear missiles, which are the only assurance that it will not be trampled [by other nations]. ..."

B) "The Globe Is Condemning North Korea, but to No Avail"

Columnist Lin Po-wen noted in his column in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 150,000] (4/8):

"... In reality, North Korea is not the country that gives [U.S. President Barack] Obama a real headache. ... What will really cause Obama to continue scratching his head for the next four to eight years is Iran's development of nuclear weapons and the chaos in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The biggest difference between North Korea and Iran is that the former is already a member of the nuclear club, whereas Iran is bent on building nuclear weapons. ... Iran will surely develop nuclear weapons, but under international pressure and military threat from Israel, it will likely slow down its pace and secretly develop nuclear weapons while dealing with countries like the United States and Israel in a perfunctory manner. ... Whether Obama will be able to fulfill the goal of stopping Iran from building nuclear weapons is unpredictable, but [it is] hard to be optimistic at the prospects. ..."

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